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# Burial in Later Anglo-Saxon England c. 650–1100 AD

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# 2. Engendered Bodies and Objects of Memory in Final Phase Graves

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### *Introduction*

The grave goods within conversion-period or Final Phase burial rites of the seventh and early eighth centuries AD have received varying explanations by archaeologists. Common interpretative themes include religious conversion, kingdom formation and new ideologies connected to both of these processes. This paper presents a distinct but related perspective on the wealthy female assemblages found in some Final Phase graves. Instead of regarding them as indicative of broad social and religious changes *per se*, the paper interprets the burial of grave goods as a strategy to constitute the social memories of an idealised aristocratic female personhood. Focusing on five female-gendered wealthy grave assemblages from two burial plots excavated at Harford Farm, Norfolk, the paper highlights the biographical qualities of certain artefacts. Meanwhile other artefacts are related to the engendering of the female aristocratic body including its management, adornment and magical protection. Further artefacts are connected to key feminine bodily practices associated with household activities and ritual practices.

The paper argues that artefact deposition was made effective both through public display and staged concealment and consignment in the grave. This has two implications for early medieval archaeology. First, artefacts were operating as mnemonic devices instrumental in the mortuary commemoration of a new conception of female-gendered aristocratic personhood in the seventh century. Second, female-gendered grave assemblages incorporated 'objects of memory'. Indeed, the long biographies of these objects hint at the increasing use of portable artefacts to commemorate the dead through their exchange among the living rather than their burial with the dead. The Final Phase is therefore not so much evidence of changing afterlife beliefs as evolving strategies of commemoration and a shift in the balance from mnemonic consignment to curation.

### *The Interpretation of Final Phase Grave Goods*

The slow adoption of shrouds instead of clothed burial might to some extent account for the quantitative decline in grave goods in the Final Phase (see below). Yet the frequent practice of clothing and adorning the cadaver continued in the Final Phase and incorporated a qualitative shift. There is evidence for dress accessories including buckles, knives and (usually for select adult females) jewellery (see Geake 1997). Tools such as shears are sometimes found, as are female-gendered items such as combs, toilet sets and a range of objects loosely defined as 'amulets' suspended around the neck or at the waist (Meaney 1981; *e.g.* see Boyle *et al.* 1998).

When wealthy graves do occur, there is an exentuated differentiation from other graves (*e.g.* Boddington 1990, 184–7; Shephard 1979). Grave-gifts can be placed around the cadaver including the continuation of the weapon burial rite for select adult males, albeit at a reduced frequency (Härke 1992). Moreover, containers were sometimes placed in graves including buckets, drinking vessels, boxes and caskets. The Final Phase therefore encapsulated the adoption of new styles of costume and new forms of artefact previously unknown in the pagan period including examples with Christian iconography (Boddington 1990, 181, 183–7; Geake 1997). Moreover, it is increasingly clear that some items deposited in Final Phase graves had long 'life-histories', being old when interred, including jewellery and bronze hanging bowls (Geake 1999). Artefacts were clearly an important medium for expressing the identity of the deceased as perceived by mourners as they had been in the fifth and sixth centuries.

The most traditional approach has been to consider the nature of artefacts in graves as an indication of religious change, namely conversion to Christianity. From this perspective, the Final Phase was a waivering shift towards Christian religious and afterlife beliefs, the first influence of the clergy on overt pagan mortuary display or simply the influence of Christian

and Continental fashions. Final Phase burials simultaneously illustrate both the tenacity of pagan Germanic religious propensities while simultaneously showing the adoption of Romanising styles of artefacts with some evidence of 'Celtic' influence (Leeds 1936, 113–4). Christian symbols and iconography on the objects have been used to illustrate the process of religious conversion (*e.g.* Meaney and Hawkes 1970; Meaney 1981). Central to this religious interpretation is the idea that the Final Phase burial rites indicate some form of 'syncretism' or 'transition' between pagan practice in the later fifth and sixth centuries AD and Christian practice from the eighth century onwards (*e.g.* Boddington 1990, 178; Hadley 2000; Hoggett 2007; Pluskowski and Patrick 2003, 35). This view is sustained by the lack of a geographical contiguity between Final Phase furnished graves and early church sites (Geake 2002; Geake 2003, 261; but see Loveluck 1996).

A religious interpretation was popular within a culture-historic framework for Anglo-Saxon archaeology and continues to be favoured by some authors, although few now accept a simple correlation between furnished graves and religious belief. The religious status of Final Phase burials is therefore generally seen as 'ambiguous' (Meaney 2003, 240–1). Hence, studies have looked beyond religion for other explanations. These include increased socio-economic differentiation and changing socio-political structures associated with kingdom formation. Social explanations for the shift in burial practices and the provision of grave goods are seen in terms of changing patterns in the social structuring of age (Crawford 1993; 2000), gender (Stoodley 1999), status (Arnold 1997; Shephard 1979), kinship structures and ethnicity (Boddington 1990; Härke 1992; Sayer 2009) as well as territoriality and regionality (Loveluck 1996; Lucy 1998; Semple 2003; Stoodley 2007). Socio-economic and socio-political changes in this period included patterns of taxation (Carver 1989), changes in law, inheritance patterns and concepts of land tenure (Shephard 1979). These perspectives have been inspired by a realisation that the church was likely to have had only a slow and superficial influence over burial rites that remained for families and communities to preside over (Bullough 1983; Geake 2003; Hadley 2000; 2001; 2002). Indeed, explanations for the changes and decline in grave goods might even be seen as somewhat disconnected from socio-economic or religious change, related to broader cycles of competitive expenditure in the mortuary realm (Cannon 1989). A further social context is to regard the decline and subsequent cessation of artefact deposition as part of a long-term shift towards above-ground monumental display, whether through burial mounds or church-burial (Boddington 1990, 197; Effros 2003; Hadley 2000).

While useful in explaining overall processes of change, these socio-economic approaches do not adequately deal with the qualitative and contextual changes evident in Final Phase mortuary practices and the persistent roles of portable artefacts in certain graves. To counter this challenge, some studies have adopted a symbolic and ideological perspective including attempts to analyse the meanings of artefacts and the political contexts within which these meanings were deployed via the mortuary context (Carver 2000; Halsall 2003). It has long been recognised through a combination of archaeological and later written sources that many items of jewellery in Final Phase graves may have had an amuletic or apotropaic functions that span the traditional perception of a clear pagan/Christian divide (Meaney 1981). Indeed, the deposition of amulets and crosses seems to increase in this period, suggesting both continuity and adaptation to the new symbols of the Christian faith to protect both the living and the dead (Blair 2005, 173–5; Crawford 2004).

Notably, Helen Geake (1997; 2003) defined the Final Phase as a shift in mentality and ideology rather than either exclusively religious or social in nature. The adaptation of influences from the Frankish (and more indirectly) the Roman and Byzantine worlds shows competitive networks of ideas and ideals linking church and state and permeating Anglo-Saxon culture (Geake 1997; Marzinzik 2003). Artefacts in graves might assert political affiliations as well as new worldviews. Equally, the final decline in frequent artefact provision can be regarded as related in part to a new ideology of humility in treating the body in death. This could represent the secular utilisation of Christian monastic ideals as they were adopted and promulgated in aristocratic and royal circles rather than any direct influence from the clergy (Bazelmans 2002; Effros 2002). The artefacts found in select graves could indicate the continued use of a grave as medium for social display but also a new conception of the body in life and in death as a medium for expressing and constituting personhood (see Karkov 2003). In this regard the Anglo-Saxon evidence can be best seen as a part of a broader phenomenon of changing relationships between ideology and mortuary practice found across north-west Europe and Scandinavia in the later first millennium AD (see also Effros 2002; 2003; Halsall 2003; Marzinzik 2000; Theuws 1999).

The three interpretative themes of religion, socio-politics and symbolism/ideology are not fully satisfactory in isolation nor need they be seen as mutually exclusive. In combination rather than separately, they bring us closer to appreciate the significance of Final Phase grave goods. In particular, they encourage a contextual interpretation of mortuary artefact as more than 'pagan survivals' or as manifestations of 'popular superstitions' but the results of conscious and strategic mortuary decisions by the living about the identities of the dead (Crawford 2004; Hadley 2000; 2002).

### *The Exchange of Final Phase Mortuary Artefacts*

These arguments have built a more sophisticated understanding of the complex interactions of society, economy, politics and religion in addressing the changing burial rites of the seventh

century. Yet while serving to frame and contextualise the use of grave goods in the Final Phase, most previous work has ignored the precise ways in which selected artefacts were deployed within the mortuary process and the burial context as well as the potential commemorative significance of artefact burial. Early medieval mortuary practices were most certainly a process mediated by religious and social concepts of dying, death and the dead. Yet archaeologists have only begun to consider the static remains left in graves in terms of the complex sequence of procedures and performances that both preceded and succeeded the interment of the corpse and how even mundane and prosaic artefacts can bring powerful memories to the fore through their association with the deceased (*e.g.* Williams 2005).

To develop such an approach, the most useful starting-point is a recent paper by Sally Crawford (2004) which focuses on the jewellery found in wealthy female graves of the seventh century. Crawford argues that the jewellery with Christian motifs placed within containers and on the bodies in such graves can best be described as 'votive' offerings. This is a crucial and significant argument. Rather than seeing mortuary artefacts as personal possessions placed simply to display the deceased's social identity, she suggests that the manner of their placement and their Christian iconography indicate an adaptation of earlier pre-Christian dedicatory and cultic practices associated with the dead and the cemetery. The principal and valuable argument that can be taken from Crawford's study is that Final Phase artefacts cannot be simplistically defined as 'grave goods' nor 'pagan survivals' but a new manifestation of traditional relationships between the living, the dead and the sacred.

Crawford re-positions the debate away from the precise identity of the deceased reflected in the choice of mortuary artefacts as well as challenging traditional associations of grave goods with afterlife beliefs. The emphasis is instead upon the relationship between the living and the dead negotiated through the deployment of selected items in the mortuary process. In this regard, artefacts in graves can be considered as exchange items between the living and the dead. Placing artefacts with the dead defined the social and religious identities of living people. Meanwhile, as gifts to the dead, they set up obligations of reciprocity and continued bonds across the divide of death. These relationships may have drawn upon both pre-Christian concepts of ancestors as sources of social and religious power as well as new, Christian, concepts of intercessory prayer by the living over the fate of the soul mediated by material culture. Crawford therefore provides us with a basis for rethinking the significance of Final Phase mortuary artefacts (see also Effros 2002; 2003).

A fuller exploration of Crawford's approach requires putting these 'votive' wealthy objects in a wider context. This will include their association with other items of costume, materials and artefacts placed with the dead, mortuary process as well as their particular positioning in relation to the dead body. In doing so, we are able to see these acts as more than elements of social display but equally as more than acts of religious devotion, but as having implications for the construction of social memories.

## *Final Phase Mortuary Artefacts and Social Memory*

How did artefact deposition affect social memory in seventh-century England? A useful starting point is to regard artefacts as operating within funerals as 'technologies of remembrance' (see Jones 2003). By this it is meant that rather than a representation of afterlife belief, a symbolic statement or a social display, mortuary practices were strategies for mediating the selective remembering and forgetting of the dead. This was undoubtedly a lengthy process that focused upon, and involved the careful management of, the cadaver. From death-bed to the grave and beyond, artefacts mediated this transition in commemorating an idealised vision of the person in death. Regarding the deployment of material culture in mortuary practices as technologies of remembrance enables scrutiny to be fixed upon the mnemonic efficacy of objects rather than their precise meanings of things or the manifold registers upon which social memory may have been materialised within any single artefact. This involves considering the contribution objects made to the creation of a burial 'tableau' that would have been employed in the creation of a memorable scene during the funeral (Carver 2000; Geake 2003, 260) but also the roles of artefacts and materials in the sequential removal of the cadaver from the senses of the survivors as the grave was covered over (Halsall 2003; Williams 2006).

This approach also provides new insights into the overall explanation for the end of the frequent provision of artefacts in graves. By considering material culture as contributing to the commemorative significance of the dead, the decline and final cessation of regular grave-good provision during this period can be reinterpreted in mnemonic terms. The move in focus from artefact deposition in the grave to giving artefacts to the church and circulating them among the living can be seen as enhancing, rather than diminishing, the significance of artefacts in the commemoration of the dead. The wealthy female assemblages of the Final Phase may provide clues to this transition in artefact-use between deposition and circulation by regarding them as gifts intended to commemorate the dead.

## *Final Phase Graves from Harford Farm, Norfolk*

A full review of seventh and early eighth-century burial sites is beyond the scope of this discussion. This paper will instead focus upon one recently-published and carefully-excavated cemetery of the Final Phase from Harford Farm, near Caistor St. Edmund, Norfolk to provide the basis for building a wider argument about the significance of portable artefacts in the commemoration of the dead (Penn 2000). The excavation in question was conducted ahead of road construction south

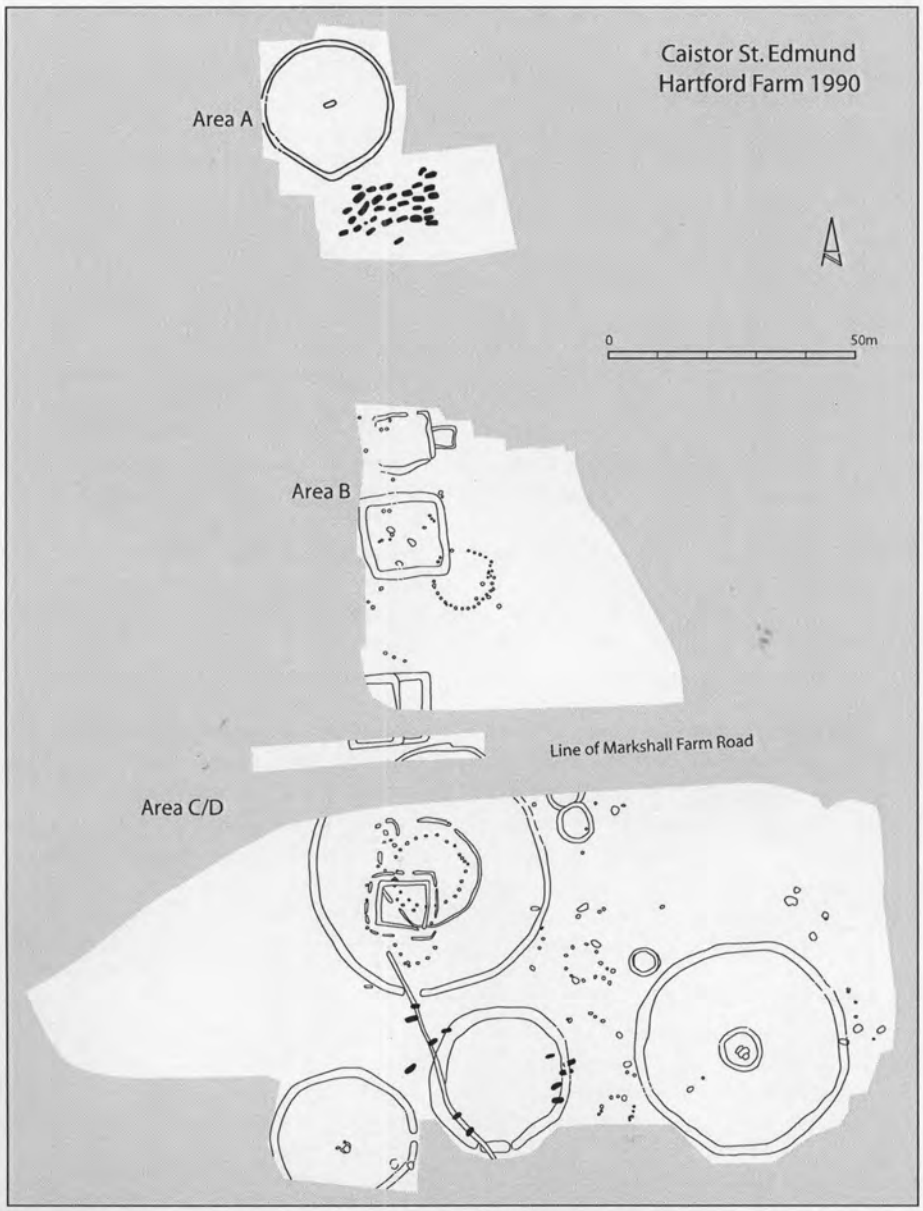


*Figure 2.1: Plan of the excavations at Harford Farm, Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk showing two groups of seventh/early eighth century burials focusing upon a Bronze Age barrow cemetery (Redrawn by Seán Goddard after Penn 2000).*

of Norwich. In total, 47 burials in 46 west-east orientated graves were revealed. They were located in two discrete burial plots, each focusing seemingly intentionally upon a series of prehistoric burial mounds (Figure 2.1). Disappointingly, preservation within the graves was poor with the presence of human bodies only revealed through stains in the soil. This provided evidence that most graves were those of adults, positioned supine and extended in most instances (Penn 2000, 74). Organic grave goods were absent and inorganic artefacts were often poorly preserved. Despite this, the soil-stains provided valuable evidence, hinting at the provision of coffins and other organic linings and coverings in many graves.

Concerning the portable artefacts from the Harford Farm graves, only 13 out of 47 (28%) had no grave goods at all. Of the remaining 34 graves (72%), 18 (38%) had knives or knives together with buckles. Eleven (23%) were regarded as 'modestly equipped' with knives, buckles and sometimes chatelaines. Of these there was one instance of 'weapon burial', grave 25 interred

with a seax. Five (11%) of the graves stand out as exceptionally rich and are the focus of the subsequent discussion.

Bearing in mind the caveat that many more artefacts may have been present but yielded no trace upon excavation, wealthy graves 11, 18, 22, 28 and 33 stand out from the rest of the burials. All date to the late seventh or very early eighth centuries and were distinguished from the rest of the graves on the basis of the number and quality of the artefacts deposited. Interestingly these burials are not set apart in terms of location, orientation or grave-size. In these aspects they seem typical. Therefore it appears that these individuals were afforded a comparable burial rite to their lesser-furnished companions, but the choice was made to distinguish them through the inclusion of a range of portable artefacts on and around the body.

It is of considerable importance that all of the five rich burials from Harford Farm are female-gender assemblages although because of the poor bone-preservation, the determination of the osteological sex of these individuals was not possible. Of equal note, the artefacts were not always located as one might expect if they were elements of the deceased's mortuary costume. This suggests that many of the artefacts had other roles in the composition of the burial assemblage than simply costume accessories. It is argued that the assemblages can be understood less in terms of the display and commemoration of the deceased's individual identity, political allegiance or religious beliefs. Instead these furnished graves were a distinctive 'technology of remembrance', they were concerned with strategies for the selective commemoration of idealised concepts of the social person. Let us explore each grave in turn to see how the artefacts were deployed in this regard.

### *The Five Wealthy Graves from Harford Farm*

Grave 11 (Figure 2.2) revealed traces of a coffin-stain surrounding a semi-flexed body with a costume consisting of elaborate precious metal accessories suspended around the corpse's neck. They comprised of a gold, silver and garnet composite disc brooch, three silver-wire rings, eight to ten silver-wire knot rings and a silver toilet set of three items (a perforated spoon and two picks). Between the right arm and the chest were placed a knife and shears, while at the belt were three iron suspension rings and a key. Another key and a comb were placed beside the cadaver's feet and copper-alloy fragments hint that further objects were placed towards the foot end of the grave (Penn 2000, 14). The grave goods appear to consist of a mortuary costume and artefacts placed into the grave by the mourners. Some of the objects might be described as heirlooms. For instance, the disc brooch had a long life-history. It was a product of Kent from the early seventh century (*c.*610–650) and on its back-plate was a runic inscription commemorating its repair sometime prior to deposition towards the end of the seventh century (Hines 2000, 80; Penn 2000, 45–9; see below).

Grave 18 (Figure 2.2) was another encoffined burial. An iron barrel-lock and key fragment found at the far west end of the grave suggest that a wooden box had been placed adjacent to the head containing an iron awl (Penn 2000, 65). Also found in the grave were a gold and garnet pendant, shears, a copper-alloy bracelet used as a suspension ring, an iron purse-mount and a collection of suspended objects of unknown function (possibly an inkpot and pen-case). Of special note is a suspended bronze cylinder of a type often described as 'relic-boxes'. It contained a silver pin-set and linking chain (Penn 2000, 66–7). In stark contrast to grave 11, none of these items were situated on the body as elements of costume. The body may indeed have been clothed but with some modesty, or else the cadaver may have been loosely wrapped within a shroud. Instead of adorning the dead, the artefacts were all located alongside the northern edge of the grave in the area of the left-side of the waist and left thigh, all seemingly beside or upon the coffin. The final item is one of only two pin-sets characteristic of Final Phase Byzantine-style jewellery from the cemetery. Its position shows that it was not placed on the body as an element of costume but concealed within the relic-box. It appears that two sceattas (silver coins) were added to the grave, possibly placed on the coffin to the right and above the head. These diagnostic items date the grave to the very early years of the eighth century (Penn 2000, 75).

The three other wealthy female-gendered graves contained artefacts deployed in a mixture between the two patterns found in graves 11 and 18. Grave 22 (Figure 2.2) contained the surviving stains of an extended supine body encoffined with two groups of artefacts. The first group consisted of the remains of a necklace or festoon at the neck comprising of silver-wire knot-rings, silver bullae and glass beads (as in grave 11). There was also a concentration along the left side of the waist (as in grave 18); a chatelaine of copper-alloy rings, beads, a buckle, a knife, a tool (possibly a pair of tweezers) and two keys (Penn 2000, 27–9).

Grave 28 (Figure 2.3) was also encoffined and contained a further division between objects located by the neck and two groups of objects by the waist. A festoon of 15 silver-wire rings and a single silver bucket-shaped pendant was found at the neck. However, other items of jewellery were found in a cluster situated outside of the coffin on the north side adjacent to the waist and left forearm of the skeleton. These included eleven bullae of a silver necklace as well as an open-work gold pendant. Also placed outside the left forearm were two spindle-whorls, two silver decorated discs, five iron rivets that may indicate the presence of a comb, and knife. Placed upon the left hip was a chatelaine consisting of an iron ring, shears, a steel, a key and a series of other undiagnosed iron objects. Evidence that the cadaver had been dressed for burial is evident from a copper-alloy shoelace tag found by the left foot, suggesting the presence of footwear (Penn 2000, 25–7).

Grave 33 (Figure 2.3) was interred without evidence of a coffin and the only one of the five to be found in the southern,

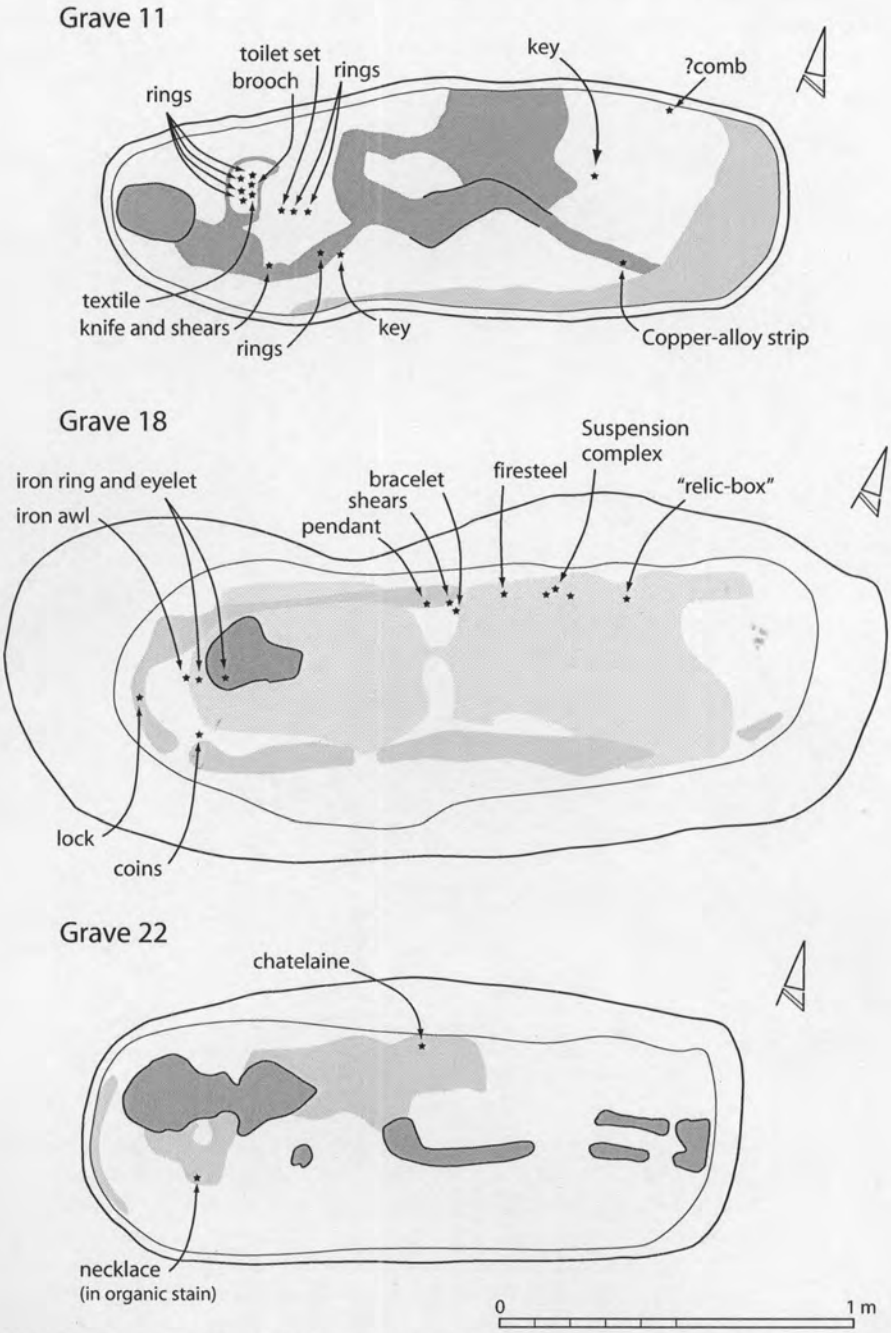


*Figure 2.2: Plans of graves 11, 18 and 22 from the Harford Farm cemetery (Redrawn by Seán Goddard after Penn 2000).*

more dispersed, burial group. The body seems to have been positioned in a semi-flexed posture. By the neck was a Roman intaglio mounted in a frame of twisted and beaded gold wire and showing signs of wear. Again this might be regarded as an heirloom of some kind. On the right side of the body were found two gold discs with garnets that may have adorned the outside of an adjacent leather or textile bag. Had a bag been present, its contents consisted of a necklace of silver-wire knot-rings with seventeen beads of either glass or amethyst. Also in the hypothesised bag was a silver toilet set of three

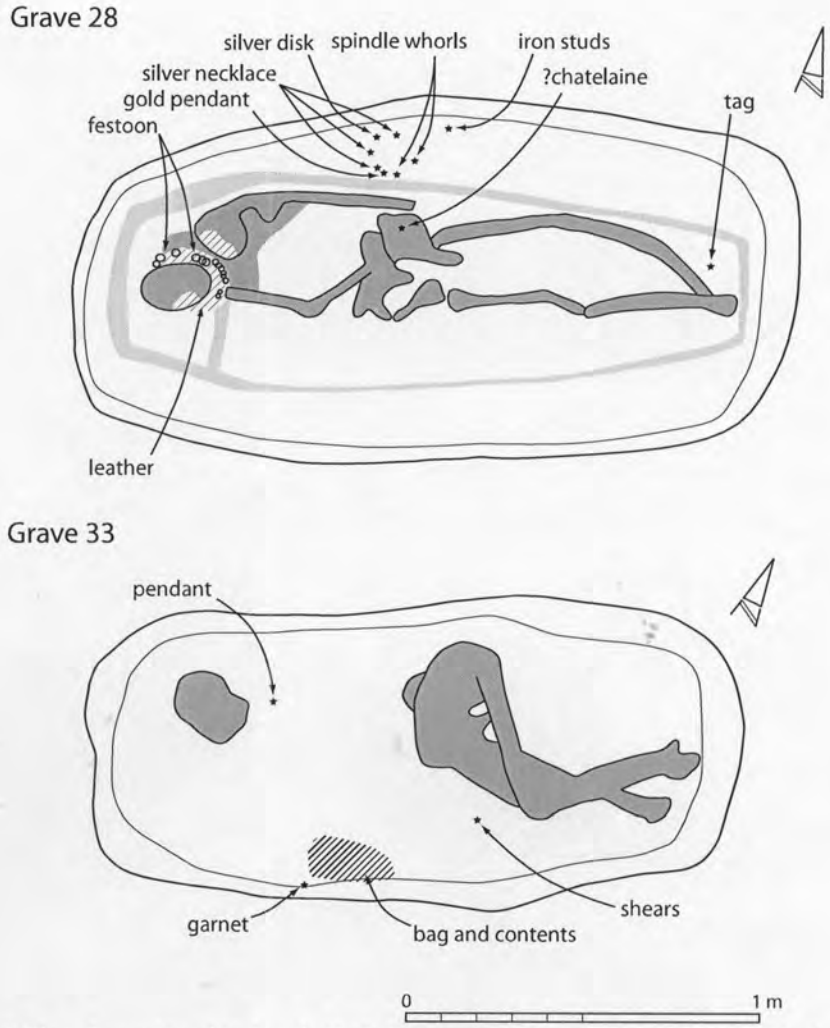


*Figure 2.3: Plans of graves 28 and 33 from the Harford Farm cemetery (Redrawn by Seán Goddard after Penn 2000).*

implements (one of which was a perforated spoon) like those suspended from the neck of grave 11, and the remains of a chatelaine consisting of an iron ring and key. By the right leg was a pair of shears. Therefore, once again we have artefacts that *could* have been worn on the body but were instead interred within a bag.

A clear distinction between mortuary costume and grave gifts is not apparent at Harford Farm. This is because comparable artefact-types could be placed both on and with the body including keys, pendants and necklaces and toilet implements. Equally, regarding the artefacts as a burial tableau is somewhat misleading. Certainly the cadaver was dressed for death in at least four out of five cases. In some cases, the mourners had placed jewellery upon the body. These artefacts may have accompanied the body through the funeral from the preparation of the body to the graveside. Yet they may have only been on view a short time before the body was encoffined and wrapped in textiles. This suggests that an appreciation of mortuary display should also consider the mnemonic efficacy of consignment. Moreover, many of the objects were contained within bags and caskets (including items of jewellery and costume) or only placed in the grave once the coffin was in place and possibly after it was closed over, suggesting they would not have been juxtaposed with the body as part of a tableau.

The same observations apply to other prestigious objects placed in the Harford Farm graves. The one certain weapon-burial from the cemetery (grave 25) had a seax enclosed in a leather sheath placed on the north side of the grave, possibly over the left side of the corpse's torso. As well as this position suggesting the blade was lain on the corpse, the seax was placed upside-down from a conventional location had it been

placed as an element of 'dress'. In grave 25, the blade faced the head of the corpse (Penn 2000, 25). Furthermore, many of the basic elements of burial 'costume' at Harford Farm are not present in these five wealthy graves. Only two of the five have knives, and none of the five have belt-buckles. Therefore, despite overall similarities in grave orientation and structure, in terms of artefact provision it is difficult to see these graves as augmenting a common repertoire. They were a distinctive practice in the duration of this burying community. The artefacts were connected to discrete practices linked to the composition and consignment of the grave.

### *Harford Farm in Context*

Much remains unclear about the mortuary process at Harford Farm and other Final Phase cemeteries. Not only are interpretations impeded by the limited bone and artefact preservation but it is unclear when in the funeral the cadaver was concealed from view (*i.e.* was it when the body was lain in-state after which the coffin remained closed, or else was the coffin only finally closed within the grave itself). Despite these many uncertainties, some broad points can be made from the available evidence.

The interaction between material culture in both mortuary display and mortuary consignment can be recognised at Harford Farm as well as in other wealthy female-gendered burial assemblages of the later seventh and early eighth centuries. For instance, grave 93 from the Boss Hall cemetery from Ipswich in Essex produced a composite brooch with evidence of repair and of some antiquity when buried. Over fifty years old when buried in the early eighth century, the brooch was placed together with a gold and silver necklace and a silver toilet set in a box and not as a visible part of the burial costume (Webster and Backhouse 1991, 51–3; Scull 2009, 120). In grave 4275 at the nearby Buttermarket cemetery, a necklet was enclosed within a pouch at the waist of an adult female (Scull 2009, 152–154, 283). Meanwhile, grave 14 at Lechlade in Gloucestershire contained a female aged between 14 and 16 years. A silver pin-suite and a necklace of silver-wire rings, silver pendants on silver-wire rings and beads together with a mounted beaver tooth pendant were all found at the neck forming a part of the mortuary costume. However the other items including iron shears, a cowrie shell, fragments of a glass vessel, glass beads and a 'relic-box' were hidden from view within a wooden box left of the lower legs of the internment (Boyle *et. al.* 1998, 58–9, 156). A further example is the isolated adult female from the Eton Rowing Lake site. Suspended from her neck was an heirloom (an old and broken silver ring). Meanwhile a broken amethyst pendant formed part of a 'bag collection' together with two bronze discs, an iron nail, a lead object, bone rod and bronze strap (Boyle *et al.* 2002, 31–3). These items were found underneath the left pelvis, perhaps suggesting a deliberate element of concealment within the grave. The same 'concealed' location of a bag collection was noticed in a late seventh or early eighth century female grave from Orsett, Essex (Webster 1985). This theme appears even among the wealthiest female graves of the period, as with the Swallowcliffe Down bed-burial inserted into a prehistoric burial mound high on the downland of southern Wiltshire. This disturbed grave lacks a complete assemblage, yet we can recognise that many of the artefacts were contained within vessels and boxes, themselves possibly covered with textiles during the sequence of the burial rituals (Speake 1989; see Williams 2006, 28–30).

Set against this wider context, the review of the five wealthy female graves at Harford Farm shows a more complex and layered relationship between the cadaver and artefacts in the mortuary process. The selection of objects were not simply 'personal possessions and jewellery' linked to 'mundane' associations (Penn 2000, 98) nor simply offerings indicative of Christian devotion (Crawford 2004). Moreover, it is the contention that reducing the objects to define the graves' occupants' social or religious identity overlooks the commemorative significance of staging both display and consignment in early medieval mortuary practices. In this regard, artefacts were displayed and disposed of to create specific menmonic connections to the dead among the living. For example, locking objects in caskets and sealing them in bags and containers may have defined an intimate engagement between the living and the dead through gift-giving.

A focus on the 'meaning' of the artefacts found in the wealthy graves from Harford Farm is only partially successful. The artefacts selected did not compose a single message. Instead, it appears that artefacts were associated with a constellation of practices and the display and management of the female body (*e.g.* jewellery and toilet implements). Moreover, we have seen the importance of the artefacts selected for their amuletic properties (including crosses) that may perhaps have been intended to protect the body in life and in death through magic (whether pagan or Christian). There are objects that may have had significant biographical histories (some were very old when interred like the pin-set inside the relic box in grave 18) as well as apotropaic and symbolic qualities. Finally there are objects connected with the household and household activities, including the casket with lock and key in grave 18 and the shears in graves 22 and 28. The burial of the key with the box may have in itself been a statement of consignment and dedication; only the dead person could access its contents in the grave (Buckberry *pers. comm.*). Perhaps most importantly, only those allowed to engage with the cadaver at close quarters during the mortuary practices leading up to the burial would have known what was interred within.

### *Engendered Bodies*

What connects this diverse material culture is an association with the social construction of the body and the body's use to

mediate the relational identities of the living and the deceased. Moreover the artefacts deployed were significant because of their use, not simply through their design and form. They were associated with bodily management but also ways of doing things, what Connerton refers to as 'bodily practices' (see Connerton 1989). The placing and consignment of these objects within the grave may have been intended to evoke a wider set of ideals and metaphors concerning the identity of selected female adults in life and upon their death. These may have concerned with the household and agricultural production as well as concerns over spiritual protection. Gender construction and commemoration is also a powerful theme. In other words, an idealised concept of the social person was constructed and rendered memorable within the grave through its composition and subsequent consignment (see Fowler 2004; Williams 2006).

Why were rich collections of artefacts only afforded to selected adult females? Certainly it would be problematic to 'read-off' the social status of the graves' occupants directly from the wealth afforded to them in death. However, it may be possible to suggest a specific significance for certain adult females in a community's social structure and commemorative strategies that meant their deaths demanded particular mortuary practices of this kind. As custodians of the future in their roles as potential or real mothers, female-members of households may have been regarded as a particular loss for the community if they died untimely or 'bad' deaths. Similarly, given the prominent role envisaged for certain women in early medieval mourning rituals, these were individuals who may have had a special role as custodians of the past, mediating and configuring social memory for families as well as the wider community (see Innes 2001). This dual function for particular women may have drawn upon traditional pre-Christian perceptions of the continuity-crisis instigated by adult-female deaths (see Williams 2007) and the roles of particular women as practitioners of magic and possibly control over funerary and mourning rituals (*e.g.* Dickinson 1993; see also Geake 2003; Price 2002). It may have also been enhanced by the particular status afforded to certain women in the earliest stages of the conversion process as envisaged for both Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia (Blair 2005; Gräslund 2003; Staecker 2003). The commemorative role of early Christian women in Anglo-Saxon England and their subsequent prominent mortuary commemoration has tended to focus on those women that took up the monastic life and the cults that developed around their graves (*e.g.* Karkov 2003). Yet this may have been only one facet in the role of women in mortuary commemoration. The deaths of these particular aristocratic women may have equally mediated the identities and social memories of secular communities. The strategic deployment of selected artefacts could have defined such group histories through mortuary commemoration, marking both the end of artefact circulation and inheritance and new beginnings for the community and family (see also Sayer 2009).

Therefore, these individuals were not necessarily any more 'high status' or 'less Christian' because of the presence of grave goods in comparison with other contemporary inhumations with no or few artefacts. Instead, the investment in wealth was intended to promote social memory through the gendered cadaver by the survivors. What is becoming increasingly clear to archaeologists is that while the deployment of artefacts became sporadic and varied in later Anglo-Saxon England (Hadley 2000; 2002) and persisted intermittently throughout the later Middle Ages (Williams 2003; Gilchrist and Sloane 2005, 228–30), it remained a deliberate choice in mortuary commemoration used at particular times to protect the dead physically and spiritually but also to mediate their commemoration. In other words, these rich female grave assemblages reflected the influence of Christian conversion and kingdom formation in broad terms but more specifically they indicate new concepts of the female aristocratic body as a medium for constituting gendered and elite identities. Material culture connected to the body's appearance, management and protection as well as bodily practices mediated these embodied identities in the mortuary context when consigned to the grave with the cadaver.

### *Objects of Memory*

The contextual evidence from the Harford Farm therefore allows a more qualified perspective on the commemorative significance of Final Phase grave goods. Moreover, indirectly, this encourages an alternate perspective on the mnemonics of objects with biographies like those found at the Harford Farm cemetery. The traditional view of the end of grave goods regards their absence from graves as evidence that they were instead paid to the king as tax or replaced by elite gifts to the church and/or investment in more effective and enduring above-ground commemorative media including mausolea and chapels (*e.g.* Bullough 1983). This argument remains important. However, middle Anglo-Saxon England between the late seventh and early ninth century is renowned for a set of well-preserved but poorly-provenanced high-status sets of jewellery and other items of treasure from the Witham Pins to the Coppergate Helmet (Webster and Backhouse 1991). Dawn Hadley (2001, 108–9) and Sally Crawford (2004) have both recognised the continued importance of portable artefacts in ritual exchanges into the Christian era. In this light, although these items are no longer placed in graves, they were prestige objects that were commissioned and displayed by elites, circulated among the living, given to the Church and disposed of in watery places (Stocker and Everson 2003) and within settlements (Thomas 2008). Detached from a secure mortuary context, the evidence is patchy and ambiguous. Yet it is tempting, drawing upon contemporary written and archaeological sources, to consider an enduring and complex set of practices by which portable artefacts retained

a mnemonic efficacy through circulation and disposal. These uses of portable artefacts can be understood in terms of new Christian commemorative media as well as in terms of an aristocratic class sustaining their social relations and inventing group histories through the use of material culture in complex patterns of gift-giving and ritual practices (see Bazelmans 2000; Hadley 2001, 108–9). For example, Heinrich Härke (2000) has developed this argument using both later Anglo-Saxon written sources and archaeological evidence to show the ritual circulation of weapons in particular may have served in social reproduction and political legitimisation in which ritual deposition and exchange were constituent elements. It is not difficult to extend this argument to envisage parallel cycles of circulation related other artefacts such as jewellery, amulets and vessels focusing on the aristocratic hall (see Bazelmans 2000). Through their production/acquisition, exchange as gifts, display within treasuries and ritual deposition, these exchanges made them objects of memory (Llilios 1999); artefacts that through their decoration, form, inscriptions and the stories attached to them, recorded and commemorated the alliances and identities of those associated with their 'life-histories'. These relationships could have incorporated the commemoration of the dead if they were inherited and if they were gifted to the church in exchange for prayers for the dead. In such an environment, we can suggest that selected artefacts – including both weapons and jewellery – were more than repositories of economic wealth, but valued mnemonic tools that connected the living and the dead through their use and circulation (see also Devlin 2009). Indeed, we might view this ritual and commemorative exchange of artefacts instigated by elites in the Christian early Middle Ages as the secular basis upon which the circulation of saint's relics was able to thrive (Geary 1986).

In this light, the deposition of objects of considerable value and age in graves at sites like Harford Farm might be regarded less as the tail-end of furnished burial and more as evidence for increasingly sophisticated strategies in which portable artefacts were selectively deployed in mortuary and commemorative exchanges. It is therefore possible to regard the decline in grave-goods deposition as heralding an enhanced commemorative role for jewellery and weapons as *objects of memory* – accruing prestige and associations through their circulation among the living rather than their deposition with the dead.

## *Conclusion*

Portable artefacts served in the commemoration of the dead through *both* their transformation and burial with the cadaver *and* their circulation among the living in the later fifth and sixth centuries AD in southern and eastern England (Williams 2005). Here, the argument has been extended to suggest that artefacts in Final Phase graves retained their commemorative significance but were deployed in novel ways. In the later seventh and eighth centuries, certain female-gendered artefacts used in regimes of body management and adornment accrued a mnemonic significance through their mortuary display and consignment through staged and sequential association with the cadaver. Moreover, the development of kingdoms and Christian-influenced aristocratic concepts of the body and material culture provided the potential for select artefacts to take on even more complex mnemonic roles. Rather than the replacement of portable artefacts with monuments as a medium for early medieval commemoration (*e.g.* Effros 2003, 200–18), this evidence instead suggests that the final end of furnished burial marked a new significance of jewellery and weapons in mortuary commemoration through their display and gift-giving among the living. The aristocratic hall and the church both provided important settings in which portable material culture mediated social memories and identities. In this sense, the Final Phase female assemblages from Harford Farm illustrate both the commemorative use of artefacts in the construction of the aristocratic engendered body and an enhanced role for artefacts as objects of memory in the seventh century and beyond.

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